LIFE AND TIMES AT THE SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGE: 1805-1905

Cover: 1905 graduates of the South Carolina College.

Introduction

Visitors approaching the campus of the University of South Carolina will first see the tops of the modern high-rise buildings that attest to the dynamic growth of the institution in recent years. But as they enter the section of the campus known as the "Horseshoe" and look upon the graceful array of nineteenth-century buildings lining a brick drive, they will sense that this part of the campus has a history all its own. This catalog will tell some of that story and provide a glimpse of student life at the University during the period when it was known as the South Carolina College and its boundaries were the brick walls surrounding the Horseshoe area.

The Antebellum College

The South Carolina College was founded as the State's first state-supported institution of higher education in 1801. Over the course of the next three years, the College's Board of Trustees secured land, selected a faculty, and erected the first building. When the College opened on January 10, 1805, nine students appeared for entrance examination and all were accepted. By the beginning of the first term of 1806, the enrollment had reached fifty-six and it would peak at 237 in 1849, a figure not to be reached again until the turn of this century.

One of the first actions of the South Carolina College students as a body was the 1805 formation of the Philomathic Society, which early in 1806 was divided into the Clariosophic and Euphradian societies, which became the dominant student organizations of the antebellum period. Each society eventually had its own hall, elaborately furnished, which resounded with the orations and debates that were the focal points of society meetings.

Notable members of the antebellum societies include Wade Hampton III, James L. Petigru, Hugh Legare, James H. Hammond, William C. Preston and George McDuffie. Popular topics of discussion were slavery, the national bank, nullification, and the role of women in society. In debates on the latter the general consensus of the societies was that although a woman's honor was sacred, she was less intelligent than her male counterpart and belonged at home rather than in public affairs.

Discipline was strict at the South Carolina College. Each school day's activities were rigidly prescribed and began with mandatory attendance at morning chapel. The students did have a few free hours in the early evening but were to be in their rooms for the night at 9:00 pm. The regulations were patterned after those used at schools in New England and actually were in conflict with the prevailing mores of South Carolina society. The students were in more or less constant rebellion against these rules and the first serious disturbance at the College was a student riot in 1814 that resulted from the disciplinary actions of an unpopular professor.

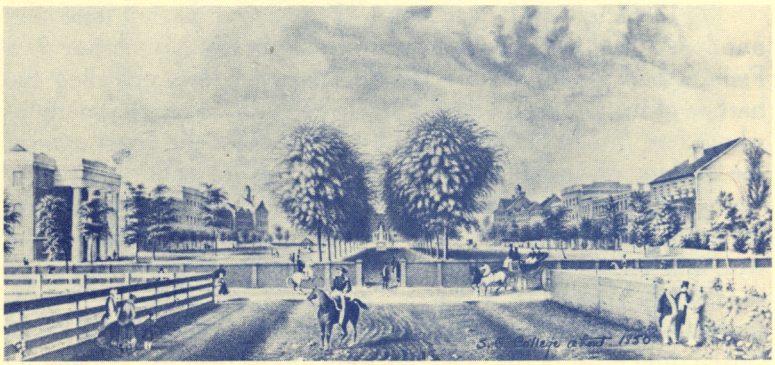
A source of constant complaint among the students was the compulsory attendance required at the meals provided by the College Steward. On several occasions large numbers of students formed agreements among themselves, called "combinations," that they would no longer eat at "commons." Such a combination in 1827 resulted in the expulsion of forty-one students, and another in 1852 ended with 108 students leaving the College in what became known as the "Great Biscuit Rebellion." Compulsory commons was eventually abolished to the relief of everyone at the College.

Duels were an occasional but serious problem at the antebellum College and two teenage students died as a result of a duel they fought in 1833 over a "point of honor" regarding first rights to a serving-plate of fish at dinner. The antebellum student's sense of personal honor was strict, but it was also limited. They could insult professors, gamble and get drunk, but they generally would not lie, cheat or steal. A formal, codified honor system was never needed at the antebellum College for the simple reason that an offending student was totally ostracized by his peers, which resulted in his being forced to leave the campus.

On the lighter side, the collegian of this period loved to pull pranks. The bell used to summon the students to recitations would periodically disappear, and the students would then refuse to attend classes until it was found. The wooden steps to the chapel would be removed, and the students would gather around to enjoy the discomfort of the faculty members trying to walk up a plank to get into the chapel. Other favorites included "turkey-stealing" and the tying of lighted fireballs to the tails of animals, the poor beasts then being chased across the campus late at night by a band of howling collegians.

Pranksters or not, there were many at the College who took their studies seriously. Highlights of the school year were the annual class exhibitions and commencements, which gave the general public the opportunity to listen to the orations of the students exhibiting the fruits of their academic labors. The students were passionately interested in politics and flocked to the sessions of the State court and legislature.

After 1840 the students could study in the College's new library, which was the first separate college building in America intended solely for library purposes. By 1850 there were more than ten major structures on the grounds of the campus, but other



than the erection of the College Chapel (now Longstreet Theatre) in 1855 there were few buildings constructed for the rest of the century. There was no electricity or modern plumbing in the dormitories until the early 1900s, and the rooms were warmed in winter by fireplaces for which the students had to buy their own wood and coal.

What the students studied by lamp-light during the era of the antebellum College was a "liberal" curriculum which consisted primarily of Greek, Latin, mathematics, and philosophy — all students followed the same course of study with no electives. The Reverend James H. Thornwell, president from 1851-1855, declared that the "South Carolina College exists for Latin and Greek." The emphasis on the classics was a reflection of the general social and political conservatism of the State during the antebellum period. The faculty included such nationally known figures as Thomas Cooper, Francis Lieber, Robert W. Barnwell, and the LeConte brothers, John and Joseph. Residences were provided for the faculty members on the grounds of the campus.

The Civil War and Reconstruction

In December of 1860 the Secession Convention was held and the campus of the South Carolina College seethed with excitement. When Fort Sumter was bombarded in April 1861, John H. Gary, captain of the College's cadet company, offered its services to the governor, who ordered it to remain in Columbia. Undaunted, the cadets disbanded the company, formed a new one and left for Charleston where they witnessed the fort's surrender while on guard duty at Sullivan's Island. They then returned to the College, but many had left by the end of the session in June to join the various commands forming in the State.

In October of 1861 the College began its fall term and another cadet company was organized. On November 7 a Federal fleet destroyed the two Confederate forts guarding the harbor of the Broad River at Port Royal and the cadets, many of whom had families in the Beaufort area, left for the coast against the orders of the faculty. There they were retained as the Governor's bodyguard, and when the Federal forces did not press the attack the governor disbanded the company. Most of the students then enlisted, but the College was able to continue conducting classes until the end of the session in June of 1862. Immediately after the June final examinations the College was closed, and most of the buildings were turned over to Confederate authorities for use as hospital facilities. The fact that the buildings contained Confederate and Union wounded at the time Sherman marched into Columbia in February of 1865 helped save the College from the subsequent fire that destroyed much of Columbia.

After the end of the Civil War a bill was passed in late 1865 to reopen the College as the "University of South Carolina." The name change represented a major shift in curriculum emphasis. Defeat in war had discredited the conservative viewpoint that had supported a classical course of study, and the curriculum of the new University was utilitarian. Coursework was added in modern languages and literature as well as civil and military engineering, and students were given some freedom in selecting courses. In 1867 the first law and medical schools were established at the University.

It was also in 1867 that Radical Republican control began in South Carolina, and blacks were elected to the University's Board of Trustees in 1869. The legislature in 1873 established a

normal school for the training of public school teachers at the University, which was open to both races. In October of 1873 the first blacks enrolled at the University and by 1876 the student body was predominantly black. The academic curriculum was reorganized into two courses of study, one classical and the other devoted to philosophy and science.

Scholarships were established at the University in 1874 and a preparatory department was created to help students make up deficiencies for entrance. The Reconstruction University students posed no greater disciplinary problems than their antebellum predecessors and on the whole their post-college careers were highly respectable, some going on to careers as college presidents, prominent ministers, and members of Congress. The Radical Republican regime ended in 1877, however, and the victorious Democrats under Governor Wade Hampton (an antebellum alumnus) closed the University that same year.

Reorganization

In 1877 the University encountered serious political opposition for the first time, and it remained closed from 1877 until 1880, when it was reopened as the South Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanics. The classical coursework was

eliminated, bachelor's degrees were no longer awarded, and although "class exercises" were held, there were no graduates in either 1881 or 1882.

Increased funding and strong support from Wade Hampton and the Bourbons permitted the reestablishment of the South Carolina College with a liberal arts curriculum in 1882. Students at the second College quickly reorganized the Clariosophic and Euphradian societies, which proceeded to jointly found the first student publication, the "Collegian" (later the "Carolinian"), in 1883. The following year the first student dance organization, the German Club, was established. Festive balls at commencement and holidays had always been popular, but in the 1880s they were to become extravaganzas. The 1885 commencement ball was held at the State House — supper was served in the Senate chamber at 12:30 am, with the dancing continuing until dawn.

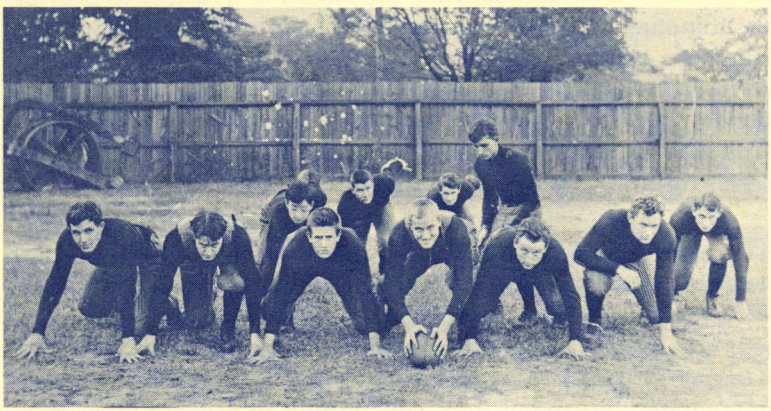
In 1887 the second University of South Carolina was established, elaborately organized into a graduate school, a college of agriculture and mechanic arts, a college of liberal arts and sciences, a college of pharmacy, a normal school, and a law school. The second University was short-lived, however, falling victim to the agrarian revolution that put Ben "Pitchfork" Tillman in the governor's office in 1890. In his campaign Tillman assailed the Bourbon regime and its "pet," the "Aristocratic" South Carolina College.

The General Assembly, at Tillman's urging, established Clemson College, and an act of the legislature in 1890 stripped the University of a number of departments and schools, renamed it the South Carolina College, and directed its trustees to confine coursework to theoretical science, law, literature, and the classics. For the next few years it appeared questionable as to whether the college would survive, as enrollment and appropriation levels dropped drastically. But Tillman was willing to support the scaled down College and it began to rebound in the mid 1890s as the curriculum broadened and entrance requirements were lowered. Enrollment rose to over 200 in 1900, the first time it had reached that figure since the late 1840s.

The 1880s and 1890s was also a period of great change and crisis in the student life at the College. A new area of student enthusiasm was athletics, and baseball was the first sport to capture the fancy of the collegian. In the 1880s "college nines"

played regularly in intramurals and against city teams of firemen, police, and mechanics, although the college's first official playing field was not laid out until 1890. Intercollegiate competition in baseball began in 1895.

On Christmas Eve, 1892, a hastily assembled football "team" went to Charleston to play an unauthorized game against Furman. Furman won easily, but football was now the "craze" and the students wanted more. The administrators were not enthusiastic, however, and regularly scheduled contests were not



allowed until 1894. It was the following year before athletic teams were allowed to travel to other schools for games. The football rivalry with Clemson began in 1896, but a SCC victory in 1902 that nearly resulted in armed conflict between SCC and Clemson students convinced the College authorities to place a ban on Clemson games that lasted for six years. By 1905 SCC students were also engaging in track, golf, and tennis.

Battles in the 1890s were not restricted to the playing fields. The first fraternity chapters had appeared on campus in the 1850s, but did not attract significant numbers of students until the 1880s. In the 1890s animosity between the "Greeks" and the non-fraternity students (nicknamed the "Barbarians") broke into all-out war. In 1896 the "Barbarians" petitioned for the abolition of Greek-letter fraternities, claiming among other charges that the "Greeks" undermined the honor system, devalued the Clariosophic and Euphradian societies by attending meetings only to vote fellow brothers into society office, and set themselves up as social and cultural superiors. The "Greeks" denied all allegations in a petition of their own, but the fight went to the floor of the State

legislature, which in 1897 passed an act abolishing Greek-letter fraternities at State-supported colleges. Some of the fraternities went underground, and the ban was not lifted for some thirty years thereafter.

Another event of the 1890s that proved to be of far greater significance than a ban on fraternities was the arrival of the coed on campus. Both faculty and trustees were opposed to the development, but Governor Tillman began the drive for coeducation at the College in 1893. That year's appropriation bill included a section directing the Board of Trustees to provide for admitting qualified young women to not below the junior class. No coeds applied in 1894, but Tillman's successor as governor, John G. Evans, persuaded the legislature to open all classes to coeds. In 1895 the first females enrolled in courses at the College. Mattie Jean Adams was the first coed to graduate, receiving an A.B. degree in 1898.

Coeducation was not well received by the male students. This attitude, coupled with the fact that there was no dormitory for women at the College, kept female enrollment figures low. There were never more than twenty-five coeds enrolled at any one time until well after the turn of this century. When the coeds arrived on campus in 1895 the Clariosophic and Euphradian societies immediately amended their constitution to prevent them from joining. Undaunted, the coeds established their own literary organization, the Parmethian Society, in 1900. In 1897 Laura Anne Bateman became president of the freshman class but soon resigned due to popular disapproval. However, the coeds did become involved in other activities, some serving on staffs of the College's new yearbook, the "Garnet and Black," and others joining groups such as the Glee Club and the Dramatic Club.

The Modern University

In 1901 and again in 1905 the South Carolina College celebrated the one-hundredth anniversaries of its founding and opening dates. The 1905 celebration sparked a concerted effort to reestablish the College as a University. Success came the following year and the decades of progress and growth since that time have culminated in today's University of South Carolina.

John Heiting
Associate Director and Curator of Collections
McKissick Museums

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